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European Literature

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The Bender

The boy had no feeling at all. A desire to feel energized and alive once again was wanted by everyone in the room, except him. The boy lay on the hospital bed as 7 people crowded around him, hoping to be the first to see his eyes flutter open after a long and difficult 13 years of inactivity. It had been a tough time for the DunHerm family, and each of the 9 felt a particular grief for the ever sleeping boy. The two sisters of this boy felt a certain attachment to the tragedy, each silently blaming themselves for the cause of this. The brother was angry. He was angry that he had not helped his little brother – that he had not been there for him in the time he needed it the most. Amongst the guilt and anger of the children, there was a sense of peace among the two older generations of women in the DunHerm family. Both grandmother and mother had not stopped praying ever since word had arrived to them about the accident. Each woman lifted a prayer of their own for their son and grandson. The final two members of the spectators were the men of the DunHerms. Grandfather and father- each tied in a different way to the boy, but each feeling the same amount of love and concern for the wellbeing of the child.

The mother was the first to break the silence that had caused everyone to hold even their breaths for fear of breaking the spell. “It’s his birthday tomorrow.” The four words were enough to shatter everything and bring the entire family crashing back to earth. Gone were the thoughts of regret and the feelings of anger. Gone was the acceptance and desire for peace. Gone was all the silence and tranquility- shattered by the idea of him not surviving the night and celebrating both his day of birth and passing on the same day. The silence grew ominous once more and the dismay of the parents, siblings and extended family grew also.

Each of the seven knew. They all remembered the doctors words, but they all hoped for a miracle. They all knew the date of his death was slowly ticking upon them – more certain than any calendar. Each had agreed, each had no desire to continue through with this agreement.

Grandfather took a step back and stared at his grandson. 13 years had passed in this hospital. 13 years of a young boy’s life had been wasted in that bed; hooked up to machines that had promised new life, but instead spit out doctor bills. 13 years of an entire families life, an entire families ability to move forward and get on with life, had been spent in that one lone room- with nothing to comfort them but the sound of a steady heartbeat beeping its way through life with the help of a machine. Grandfather drew in a deep breath, and then nodded his head. He knew it was time.

Grandmother also stood back and remembered. She remembered the boy who had once been awake and alive. The boy who had come running towards her with a lone dandelion plucked from the ground. She remembered the kisses showered upon her withered cheeks from a small boy with golden hair the same shade as the dandelion. Grandmother looked at the boy who lay- pale and white- on the bed before her. She saw the boy he once had been, but she could only see him in her mind. The boy who lay lifeless before her now was a skeleton, a sick painting of her bright eyed pride and joy. Her grandson. Grandma drew in a deep breath, and then nodded his head. He knew it was time.

Sister. Brother. Sister. All three gazed. They knew it should happen according to plan, but how could one find it in themselves to say goodbye to a dearly beloved sibling, even if they had not known this sibling- had not talked to, or laughed with, or grown up with this sibling for 13 years? Each sibling stared. Both sisters stared at their brother’s legs- skinny and unused - underdeveloped and mangled. Both sisters had seen the same legs every day for 13 years- but they had never felt the urge to memorize each and every deformity of their brother before it was too late. Their other brother stood beside them and stared at the sleeping boys hands. Both hands would have had potential. Both hands would have been used to do something great. 13 years without lifting a single paperclip had taken it’s toll on these hands of so much ability. The now bony hands could indicate each and every bone of the hand. Phalanges. Carpals and Metacarpals all alike were displayed, being covered only by a thin layer of skin. As sister, brother, sister each gazed over their beloved, unknown brother, and thought of the possibility of redoing time and making things right. They each desired to redo the past 13 years of their life, starting with the accident and ending with tomorrow. Each knew, however, that this was not possible. One by one, as they memorized each detail of their brother’s face, they drew in a deep breath, and then nodded. They knew it was time.

Mother and Father. The two who had brought this child into the world now thought of tomorrow. That day- so special for every reason, would soon become the blackest day in the DunHerm family. As mother and father both looked longingly at the return of their son, they also let their minds wander back to the time when money was no object and any desire in the world could be met with ease. Both parents recalled the day when there was no such thing as a budget and enough was never enough. Now, as father dug his hands into his pockets, he felt the emptiness of his wallet as well as the emptiness of his life. Mother felt the hurt most strongly. She had known him 9 months longer than any person in this room. She had stayed awake many sleepless nights in order to bring him up as a strong and healthy child. Mother looked at the hopelessness of the situation. She had hoped for 13 years that her son would return. She had prayed for 13 years that her youngest boy would open those blue eyes and smile up at her. She had yearned for the day when she could hear his laugh and know that he would be okay. As mother opened her eyes once again she saw the hopelessness. The boy, vastly underweight and frightfully underdeveloped looked much the same as he had 13 years ago. The ability to function normally had ceased, there was no way for him to run, and jump and shout as a normal child would. No, all that was left was the shell. Mother and father looked at the boy, drew in a deep breath, and then nodded. They knew it was time.

Each family member gathered round as they took their last look at the boy. Time had seemed to stop as they dove into the memories of a son, sibling and grandson. Time had seemed to be on their side, knowing the pain they were going through, knowing that each member had a personal goodbye to say to the lost boy. But time was not on their side. It only seemed that it had been. Before they were completely aware of it, the alarm, set for 12 AM was ringing. It was a new day -his birthday. The 7 family members gave a haunted look at each other, staring with wide eyes as the realization and finalization began to set into place. Father was the strong one. He looked steadily into each and everyone’s eyes, and then turned with a final gaze towards his youngest son’s closed eyes. Father knew what had to be done. They all did. Each gave a slight nod, and then turned to walk out of the room. Mother was the last to go. She stopped, looked back at her beloved son, then turned and nodded one last time, giving affirmation to the doctor. The 7 members stood outside the door and listened. All was silent as they held their breath, knowing the torment for the entire family would soon be over. A soft ‘clunk’ could be heard as a plug was removed from the wall. This was followed by a constant beep that came from the machinery, signaling the termination of a human heartbeat. The family slowly let out their breaths. “Happy Birthday, Blake,” mother whispered.